

# A CORDED-MIXED BELL BEAKER VASE AT THE MONUMENTAL ENCLOSURE OF FORCA, MAIA, NORTH OF PORTUGAL

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Fig. 1

## MAIN GOALS:

To present a fragment of a corded-mixed bell beaker vase (C / ZM), according to the classification of R. J. Harrison (1977), identified in the context of preventive excavation at the archaeological site of Forca, Lavra, municipality of Maia in Northwest of Portugal (Fig. 1), also try to integrate it into chronological and cultural terms.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT:

Forca is a place that contains monumental structures, similar to other enclosures of the Iberian Peninsula within a plateau of 97 m to 103 m height of the middle of Leça basin. Already frequented since Neolithic times, as attested by some megalithic tombs.

In Forca, with several acres in extent, ditches and palisades were built, containing internally fences, pits structures, fireplaces, etc. (Fig. 2). This place was in use, at least between the Chalcolithic and the Early Bronze Age (3rd and early 2nd millennium BC) having been subjected to various architectural renovations (Valera & Rebuge 2008, Muralha-Cardoso 2008; Bettencourt 2009, 2010, 2011).

The fragment of the corded-mixed bell beaker vessel was found within the stratigraphy unit 662 that filled the ditch 46, a structure with more than 2 m. wide and about 1.5 m. deep under conditions that we believe were not associated with intentional depositions.

In association several charcoals were found, pottery fragments with different decorative techniques, some of the Penha type, and a small number of lithic elements, such as flaking debris, stone hammers, a flake and a polisher.

## THE BELL BEAKER FRAGMENT:

The fragment of rim of the bell beaker presents itself partially eroded although, originally had the external surfaces polished. The paste is very brittle, reddish in colour, possibly resulting from an inadequate cooking. The decor contains several horizontal lines carried through the corded decoration, defining bands filled by oblique lines made by printing shell (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3

## RADIOCARBON DATE:

Some of the charcoals of the stratigraphy unit 662 were dated. The data obtained allowed us to consider the entire context in the Chalcolithic, especially between 2625 and 2337 BC (2 sigma) (Bettencourt 2010b). This is consistent with the artifacts unearthed.

Lab. Ref.	BP Date	Cal. 1 sigma (68.2%)	Cal. 2 sigma (95.4%)
Beta -258088	3980±50 (Charcoal)	2576-2460	2828-2824 (0.3%) 2625-2337 (94.2%) 2322- 2308 (1.0%)

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The analysis of the context of finding and the characteristics of this ceramic fragment allowed us some considerations:

- 1) that the association of the corded symbology with the local stylistic grammar indicates its incorporation into regional cognitive universe, with a probable change in its original sense;
- 2) that this process appears to have occurred in the middle of the 3rd millennium BC in place of Forca, suggesting the onset of the corded bell beaker western facade of the NW of Iberia at an earlier stage;
- 3) the presence of this single bell beaker vessel in all the thousands of ceramic fragments manipulated in place of Forca indicates its symbolic importance in that would have been his primary deposition;



Fig. 2. Some structures found at the Forca enclosure. The ditch 46 is represented in the top right.

4) Its bad cooking and consequent low resistance also suggests that it was made for restricted use and or to be amortized over a closed context;

5) Its presence in filling of ditch 46, in association with numerous ceramic fragments of rolled edges, suggests that when this structure was filled these materials would have been at the surface and abandoned. This requires an intense and prolonged occupation of the Forca but in cyclical time, which fits well to the ceremonial interpretation we have given to this enclosure.

Corded-mixed bell beaker vases are very rare in the Iberian Peninsula and known only in three Portuguese sites: the "settlement" or enclosure of Porto Torrão, Ferreira do Alentejo, in the Southwest, inside a Chalcolithic level dated to the 1st quarter of the 3rd millennium BC (Cardoso & Soares 1990/1992; Cardoso 2000) and the walled enclosure of the Castelo Velho de Freixo de Numão, Vila Nova de Foz Côa, in a horizon of use from the beginning of the 3rd to the beginning of the 2nd millennia BC (S. Jorge 2002; S. Jorge & Rubin 2002). Based on these contexts of finding, the authors consider the hypothesis that these kind of bell beaker may have circulated mainly in places of great collective importance, working in a network with other contexts of action and serving a significant population group.

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